

Council Meeting – 8 October 2019

Report of Councillor Chris Booth – Community

Time has truly flown on since Full Council in July. I continue to learn more and more about my portfolio and I have recently attended numerous organisation AGMs in September where I've had the chance to meet key partners in our efforts to build a better community in SWT.

I appreciate the hard work and progress our locality teams are making across the district and I would like to thank them for their feedback.

Rough-Sleeping

I went out with the Streetwise Team at the beginning of August to get an insight into the current situation in Taunton and Wellington regarding the amount of rough sleepers (13 were counted). This will expand out into Minehead, Williton and Watchet going forward.

The Streetwise Team has been working with partners including the Police, ARC, Open Door, Somerset County Council, the health sector and other agencies to support rough sleepers and address the issues of concern.

The Council has been using money awarded from the Government's 'Rough Sleepers Initiative Fund' to pay for specialist support to settle rough sleepers into permanent homes. It secured an extra 15 bed spaces with private landlords for people who are homeless, or have a history of rough sleeping.

The Streetwise Team have also set up monthly visits from the award-winning charity Dogs on the Streets to provide veterinary care, equipment and advice to the homeless community with dogs.

It operates a Diverted Giving scheme which means that people can donate money to the local charity Open Door which uses the cash to provide meals, showers, laundry and support to rough sleepers from its base in Mount Street.

Sangha House

Cllr Smith-Roberts and I both attended a meeting with Andy and Denise Sprigg who run Sangha House in Taunton.

Sangha House is a health and wellbeing centre that promotes and facilitates activities from yoga to therapy. Both put forward the idea that Taunton joins the likes of Plymouth, Liverpool, Brighton, etc in becoming a 'City of Compassion'.

The cities and communities that sign on to become Compassionate Cities and Communities have often begun their work by identifying the issues that are troubling the community and need to be addressed through compassionate action. For example, a community may discover a significant issue related to social justice for women, for immigrants, or for some other marginalized group. Other communities may want to address issues of drug use, gang violence, the lack of equitable healthcare, or the effects of environmental racism. Others may decide

to work to provide empowerment to youth or to educate their communities about the need for compassion in addressing environmental issues.

The Charter's Compassionate Communities program is not a certificate program that offers a seal of approval, nor does it subscribe to a single definition of a Compassionate Community. Instead, the Charter invites communities of all sizes to bring compassion to life in practical, specific ways through compassion-driven actions in neighbourhoods, businesses, schools and colleges, healthcare, the arts, local government, peace groups, environmental advocacy groups, and faith congregations. Some officer time will be spent from late October onwards looking into whether this is appropriate for Taunton and what benefits this can bring.

Fire Consultation

On behalf of the Executive and I am sure all Members, I would like to say a big thank you to Chris Hall who led an excellent members' discussion on the topic of cuts to the Fire Service. Those who attended were able to participate in a lively and passionate debate, and I believe everyone who attended learnt something new.

Somerset Community Council

Cllr Smith-Roberts and I met with Keely Rudd, CEO of Somerset Community Council. This is a longstanding body who work to support local organisations, community groups and individuals.

One of their biggest attributes is providing Village Agents who assist in signposting residents to the right source of help or even provide the help themselves! These agents first appeared in 2012 as a pilot for 5, now there are 57 Agents with a multiple set of expertise from Carer Agents to Mental Health Agents (2 out of the 5 of these are currently working in West Somerset).

Wivi Partnership

I would like to thank Cllr Blaker for his invitation to meet the incredible team at Wivi Partnership. There are two arms to this Partnership:

- First is the famous Wivi Link - a transport service which helps those in the rural part of west Taunton Deane get where they need to go for a small cost, particularly those who are elderly or disabled.
- Second is the more traditional Partnership role they play from hosting police surgeries to helping to set up community events.

This council currently provides the Partnership just under £30K a year, mostly from the Community Grants Budget. While I shall be sitting down with officers to discuss our grants, etc going forward, I struggle to see how the success of the Wivi Partnership and Wivi Link means that this isn't worth every penny.

WSOA Partnership

As I explained in my first report in July, I now sit on the West Somerset Opportunity Area Board - a partnership bringing together relevant stakeholders with an aim to improve education and opportunity in West Somerset after West Somerset was ranked bottom in the country for social mobility.

- Our recent meeting provided positive feedback on progress being made by schools to improve results as well as local organisations who provide educational opportunities locally.
- Some of the biggest challenges are the three tier system in West Somerset which the Government does not do enough to provide for.
- Attracting high calibre teachers to West Somerset. The Board will be seeking ways that we can sell West Somerset to prospective teachers and making sure our young people get the best education possible from teachers who want to stay in the community. There has been concerns over turnover of staff at schools across the area.
- The funding from the Government or the OAs is due to end next year. The Board is very focused on making sure that there is a legacy network to make sure that the significant progress made is not left to decline. This will likely require a continued partnership to monitor progress being made.

Hinkley Money

I had a discussion with the Chair of the Somerset Community Foundation, who also sits alongside me on the Hinkley Point C Grants Board. I've asked him to put forward for discussion about how we appeal to further organisations in this district. While it's understandable that Sedgemoor takes a large portion of the money, having looked back through recent bids, there seems to have been a decline in bids coming in from the former West Somerset area and I don't see why the Taunton Deane area can't also pick up some funding. I implore all councillors to speak to their parish councils, local organisations, etc and if you feel that impact can be demonstrated then I ask you to bid. Please speak to me or Lisa Redston for more information.

CCTV

Verbal Update - Hopefully a draft review should be in place by the time of Full Council. If there is no time to give a report, an update will be sent to members.

Taunton Locality

- The Localities Engagement Leads in Taunton will be approaching retailers and businesses in the Town Centre to invite them to join the Park and Ride Saver Scheme. Businesses will be given the opportunity to offer discounts or special offers to attract shoppers and visitors into the town centre via the Park and Ride services. The offers will be promoted widely and will be available to those who present their park and ride ticket at participating businesses.

- Consultation with businesses in the proposed Business Improvement District zone continues and a Business Plan is being developed. A BID is a way for businesses in a defined area to decide, fund and agree collectively on projects and initiatives that they want to be delivered in their area. Each business with a rateable value of £5000 or more will be able to vote 'for' or 'against' a BID in early 2020. Further information can be found at www.tauntonbid.co.uk

Wellington & Deane Locality

- Engagement Leads for Wellington have facilitated the set-up of a Graveyard Gardeners group for the cemetery there. The group tend to and maintain graves that no one visits.
- A joint survey, conducted by Wellington Engagement Leads, Wellington Police teams, Court Fields School and WTC to help shape the future of Wellington Park for all users has just closed. Results will be analysed and published during October.

From the intro to the survey: There are some wonderful parks and recreational spaces in Wellington and several organisations including Somerset West and Taunton Council, Avon and Somerset Police, Wellington Town Council and Court Fields School amongst others, would like to know what you think about them and even what you would like to change. We cannot promise we can act on all ideas but your responses will help shape our plans for the future.

- Engagement Leads have been working with Cotford St Luke Parish Council to support the new Parish Clerk solve a number of issues, including maintenance of land currently in the hands of receivers, section 106 queries, and inputting into the annual village survey to assess where the Council can help deliver projects that will arise from the feedback. This has been a great piece of relationship building, and one that the team will be replicating with other PCs.

West Somerset Locality

To be provided.

And Finally...

I stated in my last report that I wish to end every report on a positive. I believe a special mention should go to Ken and Pauline Sellick of Stogumber for their incredible wildflower field. Visitors to the field were able to make a donation to the Charity, *Elliot's Touch*, which is the charity they set up in 2015 after losing their 13-month-old son to mitochondrial disease, a rare genetic condition, and cardiomyopathy, a condition which affects the heart.

Amazingly, they raised over £6000!